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SUBJECT: CA A/S MAURA HARTY MEETS WITH CROATIAN OFFICIALS

REF: ZAGREB 0057

¶1. Summary: Property restitution, student exchanges, biometric developments for Croatian passports, and extradition processes were some of the issues discussed by Assistant Secretary (A/S) for Consular Affairs (CA) Ambassador Maura Harty in a bilateral meeting with Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs State Secretary (S/S) for Organization, Development and Management Vera Varga and other MFA officials on March 8, 2006 in Zagreb. Also in attendance were Ambassador Frank and Consul Carolyn Gorman. End Summary.

¶2. A/S Harty thanked S/S Vera Varga for the close cooperation enjoyed by the U.S. and Croatia. A/S Harty noted U.S. Embassy Zagreb was hosting a conference for Consular Officers from around Europe and offered a follow-up visit at FSI for Croatian diplomats who had been hosted there previously for a site visit.

¶3. Property restitution: When A/S Harty raised the issue of property restitution and the lack of American citizen access to the current property restitution law, S/S Varga said negative public opinion at the end of 2005 had derailed plans to begin negotiations on bilateral agreements that would grant access to foreign citizens. However, she said that the government had subsequently created working groups for the purpose of drafting an amendment to the current law. The amendment would allow foreigners access to the law without the need for a bilateral agreement governing such access. S/S Varga said it was anticipated the amendment would be adopted in the summer of 2006. In response to A/S Harty's question as to how the amendment would be publicized to those affected, S/S Varga said the amendment's adoption would trigger media coverage and agreed the Croatian Embassy in D.C. could highlight developments on its website. She also agreed the process should be as transparent as possible to allow for final resolution of the issue.

¶4. Student Exchanges: In response to A/S Harty's comment that student exchange programs remain a U.S. priority, S/S Varga noted all present from the Ministry at the table had attended school in the U.S. and almost "everyone in the Ministry" had done so.

¶5. Biometric Passports: Ms. Maja Tajder, Head of the Department for Citizenship and Travel Documents, said new biometric passport developments would be unveiled in a pilot program in early 2007, beginning with diplomatic and other official passports, which would include facial imaging and fingerprints with microchip storage capability. In response to A/S Harty's question as to whether Croatia intended to make the stored information available to other countries via readers at Ports of Entry, Ms. Tajder responded the decision had not been made but would be raised, especially with European Union member states. When

asked how the public would greet biometric passports, S/S Varga said biometric identity cards had not been an issue when rolled out and therefore the GOC did not anticipate problems related to passports with similar capabilities.

¶6. Extradition: Ms. Andreja Metelko-Zgombic, Head of the International Law Department, thanked Ambassador Harty for U.S. cooperation in the Mitar Arambasic extradition case (ref) and noted it was an important sign of trust and rising confidence in the Government of Croatia's ability to prosecute war crimes. Consul Carolyn Gorman noted the collaborative nature of the process and the importance of Croatia's follow-through on its guarantee for a second trial. Ms. Metelko-Zgombic said the Croatian Embassy in Washington, D.C. was grateful for the assistance rendered by the Department of Justice. Mr. Zoran Bradic, Department Head for International Legal Assistance, said he hoped the eleven remaining cases would also be resolved soon.

¶7. Croatian Embassy in Baghdad: Mr. Bradic thanked Ambassador Frank and the Consul for assistance rendered when Croatian truck drivers were killed and missing in Iraq. Ambassador Frank asked when Croatia planned to send its diplomatic representative to Baghdad and S/S Varga responded that the matter was under discussion, that Croatia wants to do it, but "small matters" needed to be worked out.

¶8. Visa Waiver Program: S/S Varga asked what data was available regarding the rate of returns/overstays with respect to Croatian visitors to the U.S. Consul Gorman replied that a recent study showed an overstay rate of around one percent. S/S Varga asked whether that information along with the future biometric Croatian passports would assist with Croatia's entrance into the

Visa Waiver Program. A/S Harty replied that while countries are encouraged to build good passports and strong border facilities, September 11, 2001 put a damper on expansion of the program and realistically, the admission of any new countries to the VWP was a long way down the road. Consul noted that the U.S. Embassy in Zagreb was one of few embassies without a waiting period for visa appointments. S/S Varga said she had heard no complaints regarding the U.S. visa process.

¶9. Crisis Management Training: S/S Varga was intrigued by A/S Harty's description of her participation in a crisis management exercise with Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK during the recent Consular Colloque. S/S Varga agreed that a similar exercise set in Dubrovnik would be beneficial. Mr. Bradic noted that the MFA had established a special MFA Crisis Coordination and Management Department after the South Asia Tsunami and problems with Croatian truck drivers in Iraq. Ambassador Frank and S/S Varga agreed to discuss possible crisis management training in the future.

¶10. Andrea Bekic, Head of the North America Office, and Betty Pavelich Sirois, Advisor to the Minister, and Consular Affairs Special Assistant Lynne Skeirik also attended the meeting.

FRANK